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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001604

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE - FITZPATRICK, BRINK, GARBE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: STAFFDEL MAKOVSKY IN ANKARA, SEPT. 1-2

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Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons: 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On 1-2 September a House Foreign Relations Committee Staff delegation led by Alan Makovsky discussed the situation in Georgia, energy issues, and the ongoing Israel-Syria talks with senior Turkish government officials at the Presidency, Prime Ministry, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The interlocutors warmly welcomed the staffdel,s visit and provided insights into Turkish foreign policymaking, emphasizing Ankara,s continued shared agenda and common approach with the US on regional issues. END SUMMARY

Georgia

¶2. (C) The recent crisis in Georgia was the primary topic of many of the Staffdel,s conversations. AKP Deputy and Chairman of Turkish Parliament,s Committee on Foreign Affairs Murat Mercan described the recent Russian-Turkish trade dispute as Russian punishment for Turkey,s aid to Georgia. Mercan estimated that the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are lost to Georgia. According to Mercan, a nation must either have the capability to stop Russia or have Russia on their side, adding that Russia has never wanted to be on the same side as Europe.

¶3. (C) The chairman of the opposition Republican People,s Party (CHP), Deniz Baykal, criticized the AKP government,s approach to the Georgia crisis, saying that the government appears unsure of its policy. The CHP had hoped Turkish-Georgian relations would open new doors in the Caucasus. Stressing the importance of economic and energy relations with Russia for Turkey, Baykal described the AKP,s proposed Caucasus Cooperation and Stability Platform as unrealistic and poorly timed, saying that Turkey cannot influence Russia, cannot protect Georgia, and the agreement would only legitimize a Russian role in the Caucasus. "We don,t have any cards to play, we can,t impose a scheme, and so we shouldn,t look to play a large role."

¶4. (C) During a discussion with Mehmet Ali Bayar, former DTP politician and advisor to President Demirel, Bayar claimed to be the co-author of the original Caucasus Platform under Demirel. He explained that the goal of the platform was to camouflage dialogue with Armenia. When asked about the nature of Turkish-Russian relations, Bayar noted that Russia is better at treating Turkey as an equal than the US, citing the noticeably warmer welcome Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan received during his recent visit to Moscow as compared to French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Bayar cautioned the Staffdel that the USG should take careful note of these small diplomatic signals, and echoed the widely held

belief among Turkish officials and pundits that the US needs to carefully maintain its relationship with Ankara because US policies in the region cannot be successful without Turkish support.

¶5. (C) MFA Deputy Undersecretary Haydar Berk preferred to look on the bright side, noting that a positive outcome of the Georgia crisis could be renewed interest and work on the Nabucco pipeline. He took it as a good sign that Russia did not disturb the BTC pipeline, and noted that Russia is still providing gas and electricity to Georgia.

#### Russia, Iran, and Turkey's Energy Needs

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¶6. (C) According to MFA Undersecretary Ertugrul Apakan, the Nabucco pipeline is a top priority for Turkey. He explained that Turkey would like to develop energy deals with Iraq and Turkmenistan using Nabucco as the conduit. Apakan emphasized to the Staffdel that despite Iranian interest in the pipeline, the MFA sees no role for Iran in Nabucco. During a discussion with MFA Deputy Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu, he explained that Turkey is looking for an alternative to Russia for energy supplies, but currently there are few other options besides Iran. Prime Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Hakan Fidan seconded that message, saying that the GOT would take other options if it had them. Faruk Demir, an independent consultant and advisor to Energy Minister Hilmi Guler, clarified the difference in the Ministry of Energy (MOE) and the MFA's agendas, noting that Guler's top priority is securing Turkey's domestic supply, versus the MFA's longer-term strategic energy agenda. According to MOE estimates, Turkey's domestic energy market is growing at 8 percent per year. When Staffdel raised US concerns with a Turkish-Iranian energy deal, Demir replied that the AKP government is out of its depth when playing

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international strategic games. Demir speculated that by 2025-30, Iran will be Turkey's biggest energy supplier, followed by Iraq and Russia.

¶7. (C) Turkish officials were generally pragmatic in discussing the recent visit of Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and the possibility of a major gas deal between Ankara and Tehran. According to Apakan, the Ahmadinejad visit was not a signal of Turkish policy change, emphasizing that Ankara does not share Tehran's views. Sinirlioglu described the visit as an opportunity to emphasize to Iranian officials that Turkey is a Western country and NATO member as well as Iran's neighbor. He pointed to President Gul's long, private discussion with Ahmadinejad during which he claims Gul was very blunt. According to Sinirlioglu, Turkish officials emphasized that the P5/1 opportunity was important, would not be on the table indefinitely, and the Iranians should agree to it while it is still on offer. He related that President Gul senses that Tehran is still trying to play the P5/1 off each other. Sinirlioglu cautioned the Staffdel that the P5/1 need to be clear and consistent in their messages to Iran. Fidan seconded that message, telling the Staffdel that Iran is ready for "freeze-for-freeze" but that Iranian officials are confused about what exactly would be frozen. Noting that Erdogan is encouraging Tehran to find a solution, Fidan reiterated Ankara's belief that the best policy is to engage Iran and bring them in to the international community.

#### Israel-Syria Talks

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¶8. (C) Apakan described the Israeli-Syrian talks as Turkey's "contribution," noting that Turkey has not taken the place of the US but is playing a complementary role. He noted that the GOT ultimately anticipates turning the talks over to the US, but hopes there will be a continued role for Turkey. Sinirlioglu called the talks a step in the right direction and hoped they will open the door to further, future improvements. He said a move to direct talks would indicate

that a framework is ready and signal the time for US involvement. Sinirlioglu said the next round of talks is pending, as both sides are keeping an eye on likely leadership changes in Israel. According to Sinirlioglu they are not three-party talks yet, and the Israeli and Syrian delegations do not stay at the same hotel, but the Turks are bringing them physically closer and closer at each round.

¶19. (C) In a discussion with Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Gavriel Levy, Levy noted that Turkish-Israeli relations have never been symmetrical, saying Israel has been "courting" Turkey for a long time. However, Levy said Turkish-Israeli relations are strengthening, and noted that Israel hopes to pursue energy deals through a pipeline linking Ceyhan and possibly Haifa for crude oil, natural gas and perhaps water, electric, and telecommunication lines. According to Levy, the GOI is currently doing a feasibility study with Turkey's Calik Group and the government of India.

¶10. (S) Levy said that with the opening of Israeli-Syrian talks via the Turks, Israel has given the AKP government an international diplomatic success, noting that it appears that Turkey is being regarded with a new respect. He described the AKP government as almost euphoric, but cautioned that he hopes Israel won't regret agreeing to the Turkish mediated talks. According to Levy, Erdogan personally spearheaded the talks and courted former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for 3 years. Levy described the Prime Minister's advisor Ahmet Davutoglu as the key player laying the groundwork for the talks behind the scenes, saying the Turkish MFA was only invited to participate after the talks were made public. According to Levy, Davutoglu believes Turkey deserves to have a major role in the talks even after the US becomes involved.

¶11. (U) Staffdel Makovsky did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

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